

# LIVING HELL IN HAITI

By **PATRICK LEMOINE**  
with **ERICH GOODE**

**Jean-Claude Duvalier's lies about liberal reform and human rights may have fooled the American government. But those of us who rotted in his dungeons know better.**

**I**T LOOKED LIKE THE MOVIE SET OF A POLICE interrogation: a stark, bare room containing only a desk, two hanging lamps, and a swivel chair. I was shoved against a wall and frisked. "This is the man," my captor said. Behind the desk sat Lieutenant Julien, a brooding, menacing figure: He ordered me to sit in the swivel chair. Taking a piece of paper from the desk, and snatching a pen from my pocket, Julien began the questioning: my name, date of birth, marital status—and whether I was carrying cash. His eyes lit up when I told him that I had a thousand Haitian gourdes, about \$250 American. He counted the large bills, slipped them into an envelope, and pocketed the small denominations. He confiscated my watch, briefcase, and car keys; and then Julien left the room.

I glanced around the room. A shuttered window kept out the daylight. Against one wall I saw a pile of sticks and rawhide whips. The soldier on guard ordered me to look straight ahead; I must have been staring at the weapons. I wondered which one they were going to use on me. I thought about my 29-day-old son; I realized that I had not yet embraced him, held him in my arms, welcomed him into this world. Bitter gall filled my heart.

The soldier left the room; for a moment I was alone. Suddenly another one burst into the room and screamed at me: "Why are you sitting down? You must stand up!" Rising, I explained that I had been ordered to sit. He began to insult me for not knowing how to behave properly. "You don't know where you are, do you," he sneered. "You will. You will." Facing the wall, I glanced at the floor. It was covered with dried bloodstains.

How had it happened? Why was I here in the first place? What had I done?

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December 19, 1971—my 26th birthday and my first wedding anniversary. My wife and I were having a party; we had invited a large gathering of friends and relatives. By the time the party got under way, I became aware that Addy Seraphin, a close friend, was missing. "Where's Addy?" I kept thinking. He never showed up.

The next day I drove to the airport to accept a shipment of electronic parts for the factory I was managing. I bumped into a friend at the Air France counter. "Addy's been arrested," he said, grimly. "What for?" I asked, stunned. He wasn't sure, but the rumor was that Addy had been caught handling contraband at the airport.

I left the airport for my office, chain-smoking nervously, heart pounding. I tried not to panic. The Haitian reality was that only the poor and underprivileged are arrested for ordinary criminal offenses. When an affluent Haitian like myself is arrested, it is almost always political. I combed through my house for any political material that might be lying around. A few years back the police, while conducting their crusade against communism, searched a house and found a book with the word "anti-communist" in the title; they actually arrested the entire family for being communists.

My paranoia multiplied a few days later when I noticed a car with official plates following me wherever I went. We played cat-and-mouse for a week. And then I learned the bad news: Addy had been accused of taking part in a plot to overthrow the Duvalier government; he had been taken to Fort Dimanche, the prison from which almost no one is ever

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released. Addy was as good as dead. I knew that my turn was next. It was clearly time for me to withdraw from circulation.

At 8:30 A.M. on December 29, my wife and I left our house in separate cars. She was driving to work; I had a vague scheme to skip the country, perhaps fleeing to Puerto Rico. I told my wife nothing for fear she would panic and do something foolish. I drove only a short distance before I was waved down by a man standing next to a car full of government officials. He put a gun to my head and said I wasn't under arrest—the police just wanted to ask me a few questions. I begged him to let me catch up to my wife and tell her I'd be detained a bit. He agreed, but told me if I put my hands in my pockets for anything, he'd blow my brains all over the road. My wife asked if I had any money—lots of Haitians arrested carrying less than I had have been killed and robbed by the police—but I had to explain that my pockets were off-limits. We waved goodbye; "I'll be home real soon," I said, and, incredibly, I believed it.

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They took me to the Cassernes Dessalines prison, to Lieutenant Julien's interrogation room. I had been standing in the interrogation room all day; a soldier, with bayonet drawn, stood at attention at the door. Night fell, and still I stood. Seven o'clock, eight o'clock, then nine. Weak, limp, my whole body in pain, I collapsed onto the floor. The soldier rushed into the room, screaming at me; he ordered me to remain standing. He threatened me with a savage beating if I refused. Lieutenant Julien ran into the room, demanding to know what all the commotion was about. I got up slowly, sat on the bench, and weakly explained that I couldn't stand any longer. "I've been here the whole day," I said, "and no one has even told me why I'm here." Julien responded by confiscating my wedding ring and handcuffing me. He said that I could use the bench for a bed. I looked at it; it was ten inches wide and swarming with bedbugs.

Little did I know that this room was to be my home for almost two weeks—from December 29, 1971, to January 10, 1972. Daily, I could hear men in adjoining rooms being beaten, screaming from pain, begging for mercy. I awaited my fate.

Why had they arrested me? What had I done? Why me?

I was interrogated several times. I was accused of plotting against the government, against the Duvalier regime. In this scheme I was supposedly in league with my friend Addy. I was a communist, they said. I was seeking a local operative to train opponents of the regime. I had contacted and communicated with the Haitian opposition during my recent trip to New York. None of these accusations was true; I was baffled as to how a citizen like myself could get entangled in a nightmare like this.

It was many years later that I was able to piece the story together.

**O**NE DAY, ABOUT SIX MONTHS BEFORE our arrest, Addy's friend Marcus, while a trifle intoxicated, reportedly told a friend that he knew of a plot to overthrow Duvalier. Unfortunately, he was not aware that this friend was a government undercover agent. Naturally, the agent was quite interested and pressed for the details. And Addy became the central figure in this alleged plot. The truth was far less spectacular: Once, in a casual conversation, Addy mentioned that it would be quite possible to assassinate Duvalier, since he was much less heavily guarded than "Papa Doc" and, unlike his paranoid father, often went about the country personally testing

his fleet of exotic cars. Addy was guilty of a second grave sin: He had, during a recent trip to New York, possessed and read a copy of an anti-government exile newspaper, *MR 12 N*, named after the date of an abortive coup whose leaders were shot in a public square in Port-au-Prince in 1964.

If this is flimsy stuff out of which to build charges of plotting a revolution, you must understand that the Duvalier government operates on the axiom: "Whoever is not for me is against me." And woe unto the man who is suspected of not being for Duvalier. And me? How did I get implicated? I was told that Addy's wife informed a government official that if Addy is guilty of a plot against Duvalier, then Patrick must be, too—because they are so close. You are surprised that some

## **In Haiti friends often betray one another so they won't be arrested themselves. Turning in a friend is the ultimate test of loyalty to Baby Doc Duvalier's government.**

friends inform on one another? That a friend's whisper into the right ear can land some unfortunate soul in prison? In Haiti, this is routine. Friends betray one another so they won't be arrested themselves. Turning in a friend is the ultimate test of loyalty to the government.

I was left alone in the interrogation room almost all the time. My imagination ran rampant conjuring up the gruesome tortures that awaited me. Techniques of police investigation are infamous in Haiti, and my mind spared me none of the details. One method occupied a special place in my fears. Prisoners, I recalled, were forced to squat, handcuffed, their arms clutching their legs. A stick is shoved between the arms and legs, and the prisoner is perched in mid-air, suspended between two high desks. The soldiers take turns beating the prisoner as he spins around like a pinwheel.

In a more optimistic mood I imagined that I would simply be taken off to Fort Dimanche or to some other location and shot, a merciful death. The Duvalier regime is inventive with respect to techniques of torture. A commonly accepted estimate is that something like 40,000 Haitians have been killed since Papa Doc's takeover in 1957. How would I be killed? A common beating? Starvation? Perhaps the garrote? All are routinely practiced by Duvalier's jailers.

On January 3, I was ushered into the office of the barracks commander, General Breton Claude. On the wall next to his desk were snapshots of captured political prisoners who had been killed by the regime. Many of the men in the pictures were battered, mangled, and bloody. I got the idea that they were on view to inspire cooperation. Breton Claude, a powerfully built man of 70, exuded innocence and naiveté while his assistant asked all the questions. Again the accusations of a plot were trotted out; again I denied them. A third man, an interrogation specialist (read that "professional torturer") struck me with his fist in the head and about the ears. This continued for about two hours. Getting nothing out of me, they sent me back to my room to think things over.

On the tenth, the scene repeated itself. Suddenly, the door

opened and Frank Esalem walked in. Esalem is a mulatto of Dominican extraction who was at one time a high-ranking member of the Haitian Communist party. He is known as "Charley," and now his job is to ferret out Communists. Esalem is responsible for the deaths of thousands of young Haitians; looking at him, my only emotion was disgust. He stared at me for a long time and then slowly shook his head as if to say "no": He was telling my captors that I was not a member of the Communist party. A "yes" would have meant instant execution.

A few minutes later three soldiers escorted me across the yard and down a steep sloping underground hallway. We had walked into a long corridor with numbered cells on each side—a real, honest-to-God underground dungeon. I was ushered into one; my clothes were taken off and confiscated. My handcuffs were removed for the first time in twelve days and nights. One of the soldiers noticed a gold chain around my neck; he took it off and pocketed it. I was left standing, naked, in a six-by-five jail cell. The door slammed shut: I was now in solitary confinement.

I explored my cell. Since I am more than six feet tall, I could not lie down fully extended; my head touched one wall and my feet the other. On the narrow side my outstretched fingers touched both walls. On the floor there was a one-gallon paint can, to be used as a toilet. A few squares of toilet paper and a filthy mattress completed the furnishings. I examined the walls. The number "47" had been scratched on one wall. I felt that it was an omen, revealing some special meaning for me; I interpreted it as a prophecy of prompt release: I would remain in this cell four days and seven hours, I predicted.

How could I have known that I would remain in Cassernes Dessalines, locked up in this very cell, in solitary confinement, for exactly two years?

The morning ritual of each prisoner began at 6 A.M. with a head count. Then the cell doors were opened, and we passed out the paint cans to be emptied. We were given one cup of



Rice and bean sauce with two crossed pieces of macaroni clearly indicated that Sunday had arrived. I didn't have any trouble keeping track of the days of the week.

We were allowed no possessions or objects whatsoever in our cells. I was given a stern lecture by a guard when he caught me with a wooden match. I might try to kill myself with the match, he explained; he took it. There were days when we did not even have rags to cover our bodies; the miserable garments we were allotted became so filthy that they were taken away, leaving us totally naked.

Finding a way to protect ourselves from the early morning cold took ingenuity. One day I discovered pieces of thread inside the mattress and knotted them together. I patiently filed a leftover bone on the cement floor and used a staple to grind a small hole at one end of the bone. I had devised a needle. I tied the thread to the door and began knitting a makeshift blanket. During the day I hid my handiwork inside a cavity in the mattress. It took a month of clandestine nighttime knitting, but I finally had a blanket large enough to cover half of my body against the cold. Two days later, an inspection led to the confiscation of my blanket secreted inside the mattress.

Prisoners were brought in and out of Cassernes Dessalines irregularly. With the arrival of each one I became eager to learn of news from the outside world. One day a man about 55 years old was brought in by a group of officers and placed in the cell across from mine. Although communicating with one another was strictly forbidden, I indicated to him that we could talk to one another by lip reading through the peephole. He knew nothing of the fate of my friend Addy and began talking about his own case.

He had worked hard all his life, he explained, and had built a ten-room house in the town of Sous-Dalle. Neighbors were envious and often caused trouble. He spoke of the covetous nature of the Tonton Macoute, murderous secret policemen who would kill you to seize your possessions. He was in his garden one Saturday evening, measuring and writing down some dimensions to begin a remodeling job on his house the next day, when he was approached by two plainclothes agents who accused him of possessing anti-government leaflets. One of them grabbed the paper on which he was writing and struck him with the back of his hand. The two began struggling. His

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water to wash ourselves and, for breakfast, a cup of watered-down coffee and a piece of bread. Then the can was returned, the cups taken away, and the door was slammed shut and locked. At lunchtime and suppertime the door was unlocked and a plate of food placed on the floor; the jailer, while shrieking accusations and insults at the cell's occupant, pushed the plate of food a few feet forward with his foot. Then he slammed the door and looked through the four-inch-square peephole, gloating with satisfaction. It was almost impossible to eat the food fast enough to finish it; the plate was snatched away after a couple of minutes. The menu kept to an almost rigid schedule. Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday: cornmeal and red bean sauce, topped with a sliver of meat the size of a thumbnail. Tuesday and Thursday: rice and beans.



family ran to the balcony above to see what was going on. The man turned to run into his house; the agent started after him. His daughter Marie dropped a vase that hit the agent on the head, killing him. The second agent ran off to report the incident.

The situation could not possibly have been worse: The agent who had been killed was the adopted son of the local Tonton chief. The man and his daughter turned themselves in to the local Tonton Macoute headquarters. He was innocent, he explained to them. It was an accident; he did not start the fight. He and his daughter were beaten by the Tonton Macoute and dragged back to the scene of the crime. The second agent, bending over the body of the first, accused the man of possessing communist propaganda. The man and his daughter were stuffed into the trunk of a car and driven to police headquarters, and then transferred to Cassernes Dessalines. The daughter was taken away. He was imprisoned in a jail known as Death Hall and transferred here after three days. Surely he would be released, he said; after all, he reiterated, he was innocent. What's that got to do with anything? I wondered. He opened his mouth and showed me gaps where teeth had been knocked out. He asked me if I thought his 14-year-old daughter had been raped. I was silent, for surely that was to be one of the least horrifying experiences she would have to face. He asked me for a cigarette, but I didn't even have clothes on my back. I tried to reassure him by saying that since they allowed him to keep his clothes, he was probably going to be released soon. A month later the man was released. One day later his body was found on the same spot where the agent died. I later learned that his daughter, although released from prison, had become insane. She never recovered.

**T**HERE WERE MANY SUCH PRISONERS, THE secularly damned of Haiti, and I was one of them. I was forced to sign a written statement detailing the accusations against me and my denials. I was assured that I would be freed. I was taken out of solitary—after two years—only to be transferred to something much worse, Fort Dimanche, the most infamous of all the Duvalier prisons. The stench of death oozed from its walls. This living hell was my new home.

I was taken out of my cell, given some clothes, and escorted to an officer's room. Addy was there; how overjoyed and relieved I was to see him alive! We were put on a truck and driven through Port-au-Prince. Addy speculated that we were being taken to Fort Dimanche in hopes of killing us off. We didn't believe that we were strong enough to survive the harsh conditions of that hellhole. The guards allowed us to sit up and look out of the truck as we drove through the streets. We passed a school I had once attended. I looked in vain for a familiar face—anyone who would recognize me, know I was still alive. No one. But the sun felt delicious on my face.

They put me in cell five. There were already twelve skeletal figures in it; they appeared to be more dead than alive. They introduced themselves. The most recent arrival had been here a year.

How can I describe the conditions at Fort Dimanche? They would seem unreal; human beings cannot live like that.

Our portions of food were so minuscule that it seemed to make little difference whether we ate or fasted. We could almost count the grains of rice—we received such stingy servings. Rice was served both half-raw and burning hot. The entire prison—more than 100 men—was served in fifteen minutes. That was how long we had to eat.

Before the almost nonexistent food we received water in a

bucket. A film of grime always floated to its surface. By the time it had been brought to us it had passed through a number of purifying steps: the guards washed their hands in it, dogs drank from it—even goats had a go at the water. We had to fight among ourselves to scoop up a few mouthfuls of water; most of it was spilled on the floor.

The lights were left on, harsh and bright, throughout every one of the thousand nights I was a prisoner at Fort Dimanche.

Eighteen squares of toilet paper were allotted to each prisoner per month. On September 30, 1975, following an official commission's inspection of the prison, this allotment was discontinued altogether. If cloth was available, we could cut squares and use them as toilet paper; when we had no cloth,

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we used our fingers and wiped them on the wall. How did some prisoners obtain the cloth? When a prisoner died, cell-mates haggled over his clothes.

Every few weeks we were allowed ten to fifteen seconds under a cold, feeble shower. It was impossible even to wet your entire body. Occasionally bits of soap were distributed. We did not even have enough time to soap our bodies. A few prisoners refused to take part in the futile farce; they were vilified by the soldiers for being such pigs.

After "washing" we had to run past the putrid stench of the latrines on wet, muddy cement coated with excrement and spit. Showers had to be taken at 2 A.M. to maximize the prisoners' exposure to the chilly early morning air. Many prisoners contracted pneumonia as a result. Luckily, there were many water shortages; some lasted for two months.

We were given diluted black coffee in cups; the same cups were used for each cell, one cell at a time. Cell one was reserved for prisoners with contagious diseases.

Early one May our excrement can began to leak. When the guards ignored our complaints we tried to patch it up with a mixture made from rice or with chalk scraped off the wall, but to no avail. Late in the month we attempted a small rebellion: Instead of taking the can back to the cell after dumping it in the latrine, we left it in the hallway. The guards ignored us. One man in the cell had diarrhea; he defecated in the doorway. Our cell sloped down from the door, and the growing mess crept toward us during the night. Half the cell was covered; we huddled in the other half. The next day a soldier ordered us to clean the excrement off the floor with our bare hands, which we did. But the shit kept coming. Our lunch was served over piles of shit. Finally I was allowed to speak with one of the guards; he removed us from the cell for one night and the following day gave us a shiny new can. This was one of our greatest triumphs.

We received almost no medical attention at all. One day a new arrival was brought into our cell. He had been beaten severely and was bleeding profusely from his ears, nose, and

mouth. His head was swollen up like a balloon, and his groin was bruised and distended. We treated his wounds with urine, our only remedy, putting drops wherever he was bleeding. For some reason, this folk remedy worked. One November another prisoner arrived; he walked in bent over, a result of severe beatings. We got him to pull down his pants and lie on his stomach. He had two huge blisters, one on each side. I rubbed them with a urine soaked cloth three times a day. Finally they burst, spewing blood into the cell. With a makeshift needle I perforated the circumference of the wound and peeled off the dead skin, and continued with the urine treatments. A few days later maggots appeared in the open wound; I used my needle to remove them one by one.

Speaking French was forbidden because some of the guards didn't speak it; everyone had to speak Créole at all times. Education in any form was forbidden; no prisoner was allowed to teach another prisoner anything. We were to be kept as ignorant as possible. Communicating from cell to cell was also outlawed, since it might lead to prisoner unity and cohesion—and possibly resistance. Writing in any form was strictly taboo. We were not allowed to possess any written materials (we were not allowed to possess anything, but the rule was strictest for written materials), and we were not allowed to write anything. Passing a note from one prisoner to another or to someone outside was cause for an especially severe beating, for that would constitute documentation that the unacknowledged prison system existed and would automatically be construed as a criticism of the government.

We were allowed no possessions whatsoever, except the grimy, tattered clothes on our backs. We made playing cards out of mashed rice and stale breadcrumbs, puréed and molded flat into one-inch squares. We made writing scrolls and chess pieces the same way. We managed to slice off slivers of

aluminum from our plates and made a kind of ink by rubbing them on the cement and adding water to the powder. With a small piece of wood, cut from the broom we were permitted to use semiannually, we devised a pen. Three of us who were educated taught the illiterates how to read and write—in strictest secrecy; we would be beaten mercilessly if we were caught at it. And, in spite of the wretched environment in which we lived, our esthetic impulse had not been killed off. From time to time a prisoner would stand up and cheerfully announce: "Ladies and Gentlemen! The Esperensa Band of Fort Dimanche is now ready to play some selections from its rich repertory." ("Esperensa" means hope.) Musicians would grab their instruments: flutes molded from rice and breadcrumb paste, drumsticks from bones, the wall as a drum. And our melodious voices, of course. On these occasions, music would fill the fetid air.

One day a woman named Clautide arrived at Fort Dimanche; she was placed in cell ten, reserved for female prisoners. One of the men in our cell, Salomon, became obsessed with Clautide and often perched on top of the cell door for hours, singing and whistling songs to her. At the end of one long and passionate serenade, Salomon would close his eyes and croon, "Nightingale, when will you land on my window?" We all knew that Salomon was being driven to the edge by this romance. We reminded him of an earlier, similar flirtation between two prisoners. Like Salomon, the young man and his prison amour would exchange sweet words for hours. His desire to touch her was so overpowering that they arranged a kind of makeshift, long-distance contact. She pulled off some of her pubic hairs, rolled them up, and tossed them across the hall to her suitor, who wore them as a moustache. Though the woman was eventually released, the young man became insane and died a few months later.

## Over here, it's not much better. By STEVEN PETROW

**F**LEEING JEAN-CLAUDE DUVALIER'S BRUTAL regime for the "land of the free" is not much of a trade. The thousands of Haitians who have attempted the 700-mile crossing to Florida have learned that even if they survive the whimsical elements and treacherous smugglers, they must face a more implacable foe: the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. The Haitians are jailed, beaten, starved, and rarely granted asylum; yet some of them still kill themselves rather than return.

Acceus Serant is a 45-year-old dressmaker who had a comfortable life with his wife and family in the coastal town of St. Marc—until April 1978, when he was arrested for a second time by the Tonton Macoute. After his escape from jail he hid for four months and then set off for America with fifty-eight others. "I couldn't live in Haiti because there were no rights, no democracy or laws," Serant recalls ruefully.

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*August 28, 1978:* After twelve rough days at sea the little boat—purchased collectively by the refugees for \$500—washes up on a beach near Boca Raton, Florida. INS officials are waiting for them, and the Haitians find themselves facing

a bureaucratic Scylla and Charybdis: They can either return to Duvalier's tender mercy in Haiti or go to jail—for life, some of the refugees understand the INS to say.

Forty-seven of the refugees agree to go back. The rest—including Serant—go to the West Palm Beach jail.

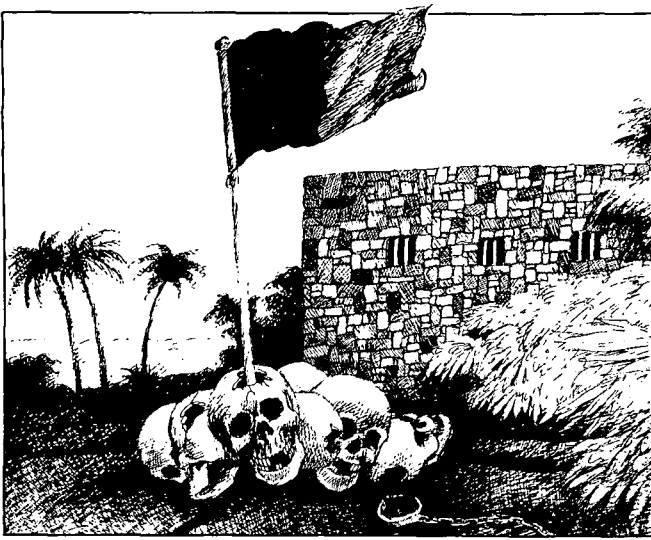
*November 23:* The Haitians have been moved to the Collier County stockade in Immokalee where the food is slop, and—they believe—the water is impure. Forgotten and desperate, they start a hunger strike.

*November 24:* The INS announces plans to move the Haitians to another jail, transporting them in groups of two. The refugees, remembering the Tonton Macoute, refuse to go unless it's in one large group. A riot breaks out; the immigration personnel beat the refugees with heavy wooden benches. Serant suffers a fractured knee.

*January 30, 1979:* I visit the Immokalee stockade. Some of the refugees have been wearing the same clothes for four months now. Others have no shoes. Several claim they have to sleep on the concrete floor because there are no mattresses. The jail warden doesn't deny it, and he also admits that the stockade went without heat and hot water for two weeks during the winter.

The Haitians have been protesting the conditions by throwing food and urinating on the floor. Warden Jim Lester calls INS offices in Miami and, while I listen, says: "If those Hai-

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Clautide fell ill and needed increased rations of bread. Salomon wrote a note to her—he was one of our star pupils—and attached it to a piece of bread. He planned to throw it across the hallway to cell six, and from there it would be conveyed, cell by cell, to Clautide in ten. His throw fell short, and it dropped into the corridor. A hush fell over the prisoners; the tension was unbearable. If the bread was discovered by a guard, we would be in trouble. We would probably all be beaten. Not only were we communicating with one another, but we had writing materials. We pulled a cord out of a mat, attached a hook a prisoner had devised, and pulled the bread back into the cell.

We screamed at Salomon for being such an inconsiderate idiot, for jeopardizing the entire cell with his foolishness. In

retaliation, he said that *we* were the guilty parties for teaching him to write in the first place. He went berserk and began pounding on the door, threatening to report our jailhouse classroom. We had no choice but to destroy the evidence—all of our educational materials.

Many prisoners died in the cells. When a prisoner named Jean-Pierre began dying, a foul stench filled the cell from his coughing. He attempted to spread his disease by touching us or mixing his food and water with ours. The stench became overwhelming, so we tied a small piece of soap under our noses. We kept Jean-Pierre and one other sick prisoner at the end of the cell with the can; the rest of us crowded at the other end. One night I sat up and watched Jean-Pierre. He looked truly delirious. He bit into pieces of bread he had accumulated so that no one else would eat them. He put on both of his pairs of underwear so that they would not be used after his death. He huddled in the corner, wringing his hands and staring at us. At about 2:30 A.M. he keeled over, dead. Everyone in the cell was overjoyed. All I could think of was that for the past five months I had shared his plate.

Justin Bertrand, well known for the atrocities he committed when he was a Tonton Macoute chief, was also dying. He had diarrhea and couldn't make it to the can, so we took turns cleaning up. Justin's nephew, also a prisoner, occasionally became so embittered after cleaning up the mess that he whacked Justin a few times in frustration. In the last eight months Justin had not been able to leave the cell for a shower or a haircut. He stank and was infested with bugs and lice. As a last act before dying he dipped his hands in excrement and smeared it all over his face. Looking at the men dying in the cell, my usual thought was the passage from the Bible: "Remember that thou art ashes, and to ashes wilt thou return." Looking at Justin, I thought: "Feces he was, and to feces will

tians don't start obeying the rules around here, there is going to be some blood shed. And it isn't going to be that of me or my men." Turning to me, Lester observes: "If I were a guest in someone else's country, I would try to obey their laws and act with some dignity."

*February 21:* Serant has a new home—the Belle Glade jail. Already the refugees have called two hunger strikes. Serant is feeling suicidal in his sixth month of imprisonment. "When we were in Haiti we were released from prison because your President Carter made a point of it to our government," he says. "Then we come here and we are put in prison."

*February 22:* Again the INS moves the Haitians to a new jail, and again fighting breaks out. This time the beatings are witnessed by a nun and the director of the Haitian Mental Health Center at Miami's Jackson Memorial Hospital. "They were so weak [from a hunger strike], and even then the police were beating them and beating them," the tearful nun says. When the Haitians reach the Fort Pierce jail, they are tear-gassed. Four are hospitalized.

*February 26:* Several newspapers report the beatings and tear-gassing. At the INS offices in Miami, officials are outraged and call the stories "absolute lies." I tell them of the independent witnesses, and the room is quiet. "Unfortunately," one of the INS men finally says, "things like that happen every day. There is nothing we can do about it. The guards are undereducated and underpaid. Any time anyone acts up they are quick to exert their authority."

*March 5:* Serant is released after a Miami minister agrees to assume responsibility for feeding and clothing him as well as to ensure that Serant makes all his court appearances. Now he

finds himself in another INS-created catch-22: Haitian refugees cannot get work permits until a decision is reached on their permanent status; and at the same time, since they aren't legal residents, they can't get any government economic assistance.

*March 10:* I see Serant for the last time, at a demonstration in front of the INS offices in Miami. He carries a placard that says: "Human rights begin at home."

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Today Serant lives in the Midwest, working illegally as a tailor. He lives in a weird bureaucratic limbo; the INS has still not determined his fate.

If he were from the Middle East, from Indochina, from Cuba, or from any other communist country, Serant would be a political refugee and welcome here. But since he is fleeing a right-wing dictatorship, he must prove that he has been politically persecuted. That's nearly impossible "except by going back and being persecuted," says a National Council of Churches attorney who has worked with Haitians, "or having Duvalier send a letter saying, 'yes, if this person comes back I will persecute him.'" Only one percent manage to convince the INS to grant them asylum.

Right now a federal judge in Miami is reviewing INS policy toward the Haitians. If he rules against the INS, the refugees will be released from jail and can stay; if he upholds the INS, the deportations of more than 10,000 people will begin immediately. And Accus Serant will get a chance to get a personal letter from Jean-Claude Duvalier to show to the INS. If he lives.





he return.”

The Haitian prison system is very successful in destroying any possibility of unity among the prisoners. They lose compassion for their fellow prisoners; they think only of their own personal survival. Most of us became selfish and hardened to one another's plight. The motto was every man for himself.

I realized that there was a psychological element in survival. Short of contracting a raging, uncontrollable illness, a prisoner who lived was one who nurtured the flame of hope; those who died had given up long before. I recall a man who came into Fort Dimanche with his body swollen and covered with sores and wounds; his chance for survival was almost nil. He was trying to flee the country; unfortunately, he was arrested, beaten, and sent to Fort Dimanche. A few days later, a commission consisting of three colonels visited the prison; they told him he would be released very soon. His health improved visibly; he began eating and talking about what he would do when he was released. He seemed to have come back from the dead. On December 17 two other prisoners were released, and he was left behind. He became convinced that the commission had lied to him. Two days later, he died. It is customary to release prisoners during the winter holidays—

**Those who lived were the ones  
who nurtured the flame of hope.  
Those who died were the ones  
who gave up. A man who decided  
he couldn't live—didn't.**

Christmas and New Year's Day. One prisoner announced that if he weren't released during the holidays, he wouldn't survive. He hung on through Christmas and New Year's Day. He died on January 2.

My physical condition was deteriorating. I had lost almost 100 pounds; I weighed under 90 pounds. My waist went from 36 inches to 28 inches. I could barely walk. My body was covered with sores; the itching never ceased. The urine cure didn't seem to heal my skin. Of the twelve prisoners in the cell when I arrived, eleven had died, and one was transferred to another prison. I grew certain that my turn was next.

**B**UT AFTER THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL elections late in 1976, discipline began to ease up; our captors became a bit more generous with the meager resources. Something was clearly afoot. Our food rations increased. We began to get some medical attention—not much, but more than the nothing we got before. We got vitamins and new clothes. Our optimism flourished. Rumors ran wild about our imminent release.

Prior to 1976 we could count on the fingers of one hand the prisoners who had been released from Fort Dimanche. During 1976 eighty-seven died and forty-one were released; more than a hundred prisoners remained in Fort Dimanche.

Although I was emaciated, feeble, and very sick, my spirits were sky-high as 1977 began. Physically, I was getting worse by the day. By February I was unable to stand on my own. I couldn't even take our pathetic shower. Each day two prison-

ers were called out and transferred or released. The prison was ablaze with excitement. On February 17 at 10 P.M. I heard a truck enter the prison grounds. I was sure that it was to be the vehicle that would carry us out. My hopes were shattered when I saw a prisoner being brought in.

Then, suddenly, an officer stepped into the corridor; he opened an envelope and read off ten names, all of political prisoners, but mine was not among them. The officer remained in the corridor. He opened the first cell and called out two names. In cell three, two names—Addy's was the second. Everyone in my cell looked at me. I removed the shirt I was wearing and gave it to a friend; he would need it more than I. My excitement was almost uncontrollable. The door opened and “Patrick Lemoine” was called out. After mine, five more names. Addy helped me to get dressed. We were led to the truck, and I was helped on. “We made it!” I shouted, kissing Addy on the forehead. I looked back at the lights of the prison; they won't have my skin, I thought to myself.

But even as the truck made its way forward, we were not certain that we would be released. We ascended the hill above the prison, approaching the crossroad at the top of the hill. Heavily weighed down, the truck began to roll backwards. Terrified, we fell silent. A left turn towards the seaside meant that we were being taken to be executed. A right turn onto the road at the crossroads meant that we were being taken to downtown Port-au-Prince to be processed and released. One prisoner asked, “What's going on?” But no one responded. Slowly the truck inched onto the main road. We breathed a sigh of relief.

We arrived at the national penitentiary; ten of the prisoners were taken inside. The rest of us huddled at one end of the truck. We were all long-term political prisoners; once again we feared execution. When the truck turned toward the barracks, our fears dissipated. I was placed in a six-by-ten cell with a sleeping bag and a gallon bucket; it seemed almost palatial after Fort Dimanche.

In the morning I was given a toothbrush and toothpaste, the first in five years; I brushed my teeth joyfully. I took little tastes of the toothpaste during the day, like mint candy. For breakfast I was given a glass of milk, a piece of buttered bread, and a banana. I ate the skin and saved the banana for later. I realized we were being fed for a purpose, and I decided to ask for more food. I was given a bar of soap and told to shower; I was so feeble I had to sit on a chair under the stream of water. It was the first time I had had a real shower in more than five years. I was even given a towel. A medical team visited me later that morning. Each prisoner received vitamin syrup, an injection of penicillin, and one of vitamin B-12. We continued to receive these medications, daily, for weeks afterward. And we ate royally—fish cooked in oil and spices, chicken, ham, cheese, vegetables, chocolate. I just couldn't get enough of it. Sometimes I ate so much I couldn't stand up, sit down, or lie down comfortably. I got a case of diarrhea, but I didn't inform the doctor; I would rather have died of it than be given less food. I was in constant fear of being sent back to Fort Dimanche, so I was building up my strength just in case.

Each morning I attempted to do one push-up and failed. On March 17, exactly one month after my arrival at the barracks, I managed to do my first push-up. I knew I was getting better. The next night while I was sleeping the beautiful woman who used to appear frequently in my dreams made a reappearance. She caressed me all over; I was ecstatic. I had a nocturnal emission. For three years my penis had been completely dormant. I felt like a man again.

I made a schedule for myself. I woke at 5 A.M. I exercised.

Shower at 6:30. At 7:30 breakfast was served. I ate slowly, masticating each mouthful fifty times with my eyes closed. At 8:30 I played chess, the right hand playing the left. I sewed and knitted till lunchtime; lunch was served around 2 P.M. I paced my cell a lot and played a lot of chess. After supper, another stroll. All the while I tormented myself wondering why I had spent six years behind bars. What crime had I committed? I was not tried in court, I was not proven guilty, no sentence was formally reached on my case. How did the government profit by my incarceration? I never came up with any answers. At 9 P.M. I would fix my bed, and then I prayed for a new day in Haiti—the downfall of Jean-Claude Duvalier.

At the end of August a guard told me that all the important military officers were working on the political cases. I recalled that, earlier, I had heard the American national anthem played. The American ambassador to the UN, Andrew Young, had paid a visit to Haiti, but the name did not mean much to me. It was he, I learned later, implementing President Jimmy Carter's human rights policy, who had pressured the Duvalier regime to release all the political prisoners in Haiti. (Young even talked about it publicly, which greatly embarrassed Duvalier.) This was what our release was all about.

By the middle of September we were photographed, given typhoid shots, and X-rayed. We were given haircuts and shaves. We were supplied with new clothes. If they didn't quite fit, they went back for alterations. I wondered where I was going that I had to look so good.

**O**N SEPTEMBER 21, I TOOK MY USUAL morning shower at 6:30. It was followed by breakfast. I had accumulated twenty-six biscuits that I could never eat. At 9 A.M. the jailer opened my cell door and told me to shower again; he gave me a bar of scented soap. I was then given a blue suit to wear. Ten of us were led to the barracks commander's office; on the way, an officer gave me a bottle of perfume. All ten of us sat down. (Another political prisoner was still in the hospital.) The commander told us that we were being freed shortly. He said that our freedom was solely a government decision; there had been no pressure for our release. Then he looked up at us. We were silent. He was surprised that none of us expressed any thanks for our release. With rising emotion he said that this would be the first time that President Duvalier, whose office was nearby, would not hear cries of gratitude from pardoned prisoners. He expected a cheer; instead there was more silence. Tension mounted. Finally, one prisoner got up and said, "Colonel, you have to understand that after all these years in prison, we cannot find the words to express our feelings." He sat down.

We were then ushered into the office of the minister of the interior, where the news media awaited us. The minister of the interior read the presidential decree that proclaimed total amnesty for all political prisoners in Haiti. A total of 104 prisoners would be released; eleven were to be expelled from the country as terrorists too dangerous to be allowed to remain on the domestic scene. I was one of the eleven. The government boasted that all political prisoners were released, an obvious lie: I personally knew of several dozen political prisoners left behind.

On the same day, we were brought to the barracks and served lunch in the commander's room. We were allowed to telephone our families so that they could bring some of our belongings. The minister of the interior was to arrive shortly with our passports and airline tickets. My wife and son arrived; my son was now tall, six years old. Tears filled my eyes.

**My wife and son arrived. Tears filled my eyes. "I have a father like everyone else!" he shouted. I began sobbing. My wife stood behind him, cold and stiff.**

"I have a father like everybody else," he shouted. I began sobbing. My wife was standing behind him, cold and stiff. I told her I was being expelled from the country; I inquired as to the status of our relationship. She said that as far back as 1975 she had been told I was dead. I offered to make our estrangement legal. She whispered that it had already been done. Divorce, Haitian style.

By that evening the interior minister still had not arrived. The next day the Haitian newspapers reported that we had already left the country. We spent four days under guard; we were not even allowed to go out of the building into the yard. On Sunday, around noon, our passports were brought to us. We boarded the plane, our destination still unknown. Sitting on the plane, we opened the passports: They contained no visas. We looked at the tickets. They were all round trips: Port-au-Prince to Kingston, to London, to Amsterdam, to Curaçao, and back to Port-au-Prince. We assumed that the plan was to have us return to Haiti. Without visas, we would not be allowed to stay anywhere. We became convinced that the plan was to tell the world that we were such dangerous criminals that no country in the world would take us; the only place for us was—back in Fort Dimanche!

Because of the delay in Port-au-Prince, we missed our connection to London; luckily, we were granted a week's stay in Kingston. During this time we learned that Dutch immigration was cooperating thoroughly with the Haitian government; they were expecting our arrival and were preparing to send us right back to Haiti. The Netherlands, that haven for exiles the world over, wouldn't let any of us in. So each of us had to arrange to immigrate to one country or another—any country that would take us. We all applied for entry into France; all were rejected. Four of us made it into Canada, three to Belgium, and two stayed in Jamaica. Since my mother is an American citizen, I was allowed to immigrate to the United States—but only after I resisted pressure from the U.S. consul, who wanted me to confess that I had been trying to overthrow the Haitian government. Since Addy's brother lives in the States, he was also allowed to enter, but only after four months of hassle and the strategic intervention of Andrew Young and Representative Walter Fauntroy (D-Wash., D.C.).

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It has been two-and-a-half years since I left Haiti. I do not regret my exile. The Duvalier regime has not changed. If I had stayed there, I would certainly have been rearrested; and this time the prison would have killed me. I know it.

I live in New York now, and I have a girlfriend. By day I study to be an airplane mechanic; by night I am a parking lot attendant. Often it is a struggle to make ends meet. But that is all right. Now I feel something I haven't felt since those earliest days in Cassernes Dessalines. I feel hope. □



# COUNTING 1980 HEADS IN

Census Day is almost here. The government wants to know how many flush toilets you have in your home. Also, if you've got a "mental condition" which has lasted more than six months and which limits your use of public transportation, you'd better report it. Of course, if you're the type of person who doesn't mind broadcasting this sort of information, you won't object to Bureau of the Census Form D-2. In any case, you'll want to read E. Scott Royce's analysis of this year's head count and its predecessors. And Art Hoppe's behind-the-scenes report on how the Founding Fathers started this numbers game just might cheer you up.

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## The Need to Know

By E. SCOTT ROYCE

**A**RE YOU MARRIED TO the person with whom you reside? Is a language other than English spoken in your home? Do you have a "physical, mental, or other health condition" which has limited or prevented you from working? How many times have you been married? If you were born outside the United States, are you a naturalized citizen? Did you work at any time last week? If so, at what location, and for

how many hours? Does your residence have "complete plumbing facilities"? How many babies, "not counting stillbirths," has each woman in your household had? Do you believe that these and similar questions are nobody's business but your own?

If your answer to the last query was "yes" and you are inclined to act on that basis, beware. All the previous questions can be found on the long version of the 1980 census form, which will be deliv-

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*E. SCOTT ROYCE is a freelance writer based in Washington, D.C.*

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## The Great Census Debate of 1787

By ART HOPPE

**A**PRIL 1, FITTINGLY enough, is Census Day; and I have at hand U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Form D-2. This form, I am reassured to see, was "Approved: O.M.B. No. 410S78006" and opens with a cheery message from the director, Bureau of the Census:

"We must," he writes, "from time to time, take stock of ourselves as a people if our Nation is to meet successfully the

many local challenges we face. This is the purpose of the 1980 census.

"The essential need for a population census was recognized almost 200 years ago when our Constitution was written. As provided by Article I, the first census was conducted in 1790, and one has been taken every ten years since then."

The director is absolutely correct. Article I plainly states that representatives to Congress "shall be apportioned among the several states which may be

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*ART HOPPE is a nationally-syndicated humor columnist.*

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